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SUBJECT: POLICE ORGANIZE MOB TO THREATEN HUMAN RIGHTS MARCH

11. (SBU) Summary: Leading human rights activist Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello told Poloff that on Wednesday a group of ten dissidents participated in a march in the town of Santa Clara. The police organized a group of civilians who threatened the marchers with sticks. However; no one was actually struck. The next day one of the civilians recruited by the police confronted one of the marchers, Jorge Luiz Artilles Montiel, and beat him causing serious injuries to the face and head. Police dismissed Artilles' complaint as resulting from a personal quarrel. Marta Roque also states that police are investigating another participant in the march, Noelia Pedraza, for distributing literature. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Long standing human rights activist Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello stated that she heard directly from participants of a protest held on 5 September in the town of Santa Clara, located in the center of the island. MBR reports that for many months dissidents have held a meeting every Wednesday in remembrance of political prisoners. They light a candle for those in Cuban jails. The group is affiliated with Plantados, an organization of ex-Cuban prisoners in Florida, who hold similar ceremonies. Prior to this week all these meetings were held indoors. The police and government officials had never before attempted to disrupt these activities.

13. (SBU) The dissidents on 5 September held for the first time an outdoor march. They walked 1 kilometer to a cemetery where they lit a candle and unfurled a Cuban flag. MBR believes that the march attracted police attention because youths questioned the protesters what they were doing. When the marchers replied that they were working for human rights, some of the youths started shouting "Long live human rights" and "Down with Fidel". The protesters did not join in these chants. On the way back a rapid response brigade confronted them. (Rapid response brigades are groups of civilians that the police mobilize supposedly to handle emergencies. Reliable dissidents have reported in the past cases where the police could not find a local person willing to serve on such a brigade and so the police went to a neighboring town where they enlisted factory workers with the threat of losing their jobs). The rapid response brigade threatened the marchers with sticks but did not actually strike anyone. The protesters returned to their homes peacefully.

¶4. (C) On Thursday 6 September, a member of the previous evening's rapid response brigade confronted a participant of the march, Jorge Luiz Artiles, outside Artiles' home. MBR only knew that this person is called "Pepe" and that he is allegedly married to an American citizen. (POL officer is seeking more identifying information). Artiles stated that after Pepe started insulting him with well known terms the government uses against members of the opposition such as "traitor" and "worm", Pepe began beating him. Artiles went to a clinic where he was treated for what was reported as serious injuries to the face and back of the head. He brought a medical certificate to the police to file a complaint but the police dismissed this as a personal quarrel between the two individuals. Marta Roque believes firmly that state security agents provoked the attack. Artiles is an ex-political prisoner out on a conditional release.

¶5. (SBU) Also on Thursday the police searched Noelia Pedraza. She had been distributing literature on the streets of Santa Clara but by the time the police stopped her she'd given away all of the books in her possession. MBR stated that the police sought out people who had received books from Pedraza and asked them to identify her. Apparently everyone asked replied that they could not identify Pedraza.

¶6. (C) Comment. The regime may have felt that a crackdown in Santa Clara- a town four hours east of the capital- would go unnoticed.

PARMLY